

College Part-Time Workers

A current overview

March 2007

The Issue: Part-time college workers in Ontario are denied the right to bargain collectively by the provincial *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act*, which was passed in 1975. Ontario is the only province where part-time college workers are denied this right and we are even unique in Ontario, where part-time university, health care and liquor store workers, for example, have a right to and do join or form a union. There are currently 17,000 women and men who work part-time in Ontario's twenty-four community colleges. There are only 15,000 full-time college workers.

Some recent history:

In November 2006, delegates from all community colleges in Ontario met to form the Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (OPSECAAT) and adopted a constitution and elected an executive to fight for the rights of part-time college workers.

Also in November 2006, the International Labour Organization (ILO) rebuked the Ontario government and recommended that it rapidly "*take legislative measures, in consultation with the social partners, to ensure that academic and part-time support staff in colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario fully enjoy the rights to organize and bargain collectively, as any other workers.*" So far, the government has not acted.

In mid-January 2007, OPSECAAT launched a membership drive at all community colleges in Ontario. The drive in every respect mirrors a union drive, and is one of the biggest membership drives in the history of the labour movement in Ontario. It will conclude at the end of the winter school term.

Our concerns include:

We met with the College Compensation and Appointments Council – which negotiates collective agreements with full-time faculty and support staff for all twenty-four community colleges – and we laid out six immediate demands, as follows:

- a protocol for hiring and retaining part-time and sessional workers in colleges in Ontario, including a policy for posting these positions;

- a process for dealing with the complaints and grievances of part-time college workers;
- standardized pay schedules and paybands across all colleges for part-time and sessional faculty and support staff;
- research on benefits for part-time and sessional college workers;
- a proposal for improving and standardizing working conditions for part-time and sessional workers in Ontario colleges;
- a multi-year plan for converting part-time and sessional workers to full-time workers at community colleges.

Quality of education is also of great concern to us as college workers. What is increasingly developing in our community college system in Ontario is a kind of turnstile syndrome. People come in, get the training they need in a completely *ad hoc* fashion, become disheartened, and leave. In comes the next crew. Now if only 20 percent of the workers in community colleges were part-time, it might not be too serious. But when you have 8,500 part-time and sessional faculty and 8,500 part-time college support workers coming and going at an ever increasing and alarming rate, you have a problem.

The solutions are pretty straightforward.

First, **the government must amend the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act*** to allow part-time college workers the right to bargain collectively, “as any other workers,” as the ILO put it.

Second, **the government must stop underfunding colleges in Ontario**, especially since it is doing it on the backs of part-time workers. The Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) environmental scan for 2006 points out that even after increases in funding by the Liberals, Ontario is still number nine out of the ten provinces in funding per full-time college student. Ontario colleges receive a paltry 70 percent of the national average of revenue per full-time student. Moreover, even in Ontario the college system is the “poor cousin” of the educational system. Colleges receive \$7,313 per full time student while the numbers for secondary schools and universities are, respectively, \$8,079 and \$11,784.

Part-time college workers know that the chronic underfunding of Ontario colleges is a result of a loophole in an Act that provides colleges with access to a pool of cheap labour that cannot defend itself from exploitation! This must end. This will end. We will use every measure available to us to achieve this goal. Because we know **Ontario can – and must – do better.**